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Reagan omits Syria as sponsor of international terrorism

By Ted Agres
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President Reagan yesterday conspicuously omitted Syria, whose President Hafez Assad helped the United States secure the release of U.S. hostages in Lebanon, when he branded five other countries as supporters of international terrorism.

Syria, a radical state that receives massive Soviet arms and weaponry, remains on the administration's official list of countries that sponsor terrorism, the State Department confirmed yesterday.

The president included Nicaragua among terrorist-supporting countries, although the administration has not formally listed it as such.

State Department spokesman Edward Djerejian, when asked why

Mr. Reagan had failed to mention Syria, said the president's remarks were "not all-inclusive" but rather "examples" of countries that have recently been very active in state-sponsored terrorism.

He also said that he believes Nicaragua is not on the State Department's official list of such countries.

"The president's remarks were explanatory," Mr. Djerejian said, cautioning reporters to "steer away" from linking the president's remarks to the official State Department list. Before the Beirut hostage crisis, the department routinely labeled Syria as a terrorist-supporting nation.

Mr. Reagan evidently refrained from criticizing Syria because of Mr. Assad's help in freeing the hos-

tages and because the president is seeking Syria's assistance in freeing the seven remaining U.S. hostages believed held in Lebanon.

Mr. Djerejian yesterday declined to comment when asked if the president's failure to mention Syria was related to that nation's role in the release of the TWA Flight 847 hostages.

Newsweek magazine is reporting this week that Mr. Reagan called to thank the Syrian president for his help in the release of the hostages, but angered Mr. Assad by demand-

ing his aid in freeing the seven Americans still held captive in Lebanon.

Mr. Djerejian declined to comment on that report except to say he believes that a telephone conversation between Mr. Reagan and the

Syrian president did occur last week.

Despite Mr. Reagan's omission of Syria, the administration has long had detailed reports of that country's involvement in international terrorism.

An assessment of radical state-sponsored terrorism prepared for the CIA lists a "core radical coalition" composed of Libya, Iran, Syria, Cuba and North Korea. The report states these countries share two basic elements: "extreme hostility toward the United States [and] deep anxiety over U.S. intentions and policies."

Other reports have connected Syria with Libyan and Iranian efforts to coordinate attacks against U.S. targets in the Middle East and elsewhere.

The foreign ministers of those three countries, for example, met in Tehran in January where they reportedly agreed to escalate terrorism against U.S. interests and personnel worldwide.

Shi'ite terrorists, working with Syrian and Iranian secret services, have struck U.S. targets 16 times in the Middle East since April 1983, according to intelligence reports. Syria's pro-consul in Lebanon, Col. Ghazi Kana'an, is said to hold a supervisory position for Shi'ites in that country and has worked closely with the KGB in Syria and in Lebanon.

Mr. Assad, who exerts de facto control over much of war-ravaged Lebanon, initially authorized the installation of Iranian terrorists in

Lebanon's Bekaa Valley, reports state.

Mr. Assad has professed his strong personal admiration for the effectiveness of suicide squads. He told the ninth Congress of the National Federation of Syrian Students on May 4: "I have believed in the greatness of martyrdom and the importance of sacrifice since my youth. . . . Early in my military life, I used to discuss with my colleagues the necessity for the state to form suicide squads among the pilots.

"My conviction of martyrdom is neither incidental nor temporary," Mr. Assad said. "I hope that my life will end only in martyrdom."

Dave Doubrava contributed to this report.